

Judge Hollenbeck to retire at end of 2010

Kristin M. Kraemer, Herald staff writer

Benton County District Court Judge Holly Hollenbeck has decided to hang up his black robe at the end of 2010.

The longtime jurist announced his retirement Thursday afternoon, saying he wants others to have the opportunity to run for his seat in the next election.

He is in the last year of his four-year term and would have hit the judicial age limit had he sought to keep his position in 2011.

"The reason I'm doing this is I want to give people notice so they can go ahead and sign up for election," Hollenbeck told the Herald. If re-elected, "I would only serve nine more months because of my age, and that's not fair."

Hollenbeck will be 64 when he leaves in 12 months. He has been a full-time District Court judge for 15 years, with an additional 10 years serving as a judge pro-tem.

Hollenbeck most recently was the court's presiding judge, a rotating administrative job he hands over now to Judge Terry Tanner.

During his tenure, Hollenbeck has watched the caseload grow and the court expand from three judges to five. He also has sparked some controversy over the years.

In June 2008, Hollenbeck released a drunken driving suspect from jail and into her lawyer's custody so she could pack for a trip to Europe the next day.

Sheriff Larry Taylor was angered by Hollenbeck's comment that her early release wasn't unusual, and ordered an audit of DUI releases from his jail.

Hollenbeck defended his decision, saying judges routinely intervene to release prisoners from jail.

And in January 2008, Hollenbeck apologized for telling a woman with cancer to take a knitted cap off her bald head or leave his courtroom.

The woman had been in the courtroom to support her teenage daughter and ended up leaving in tears. The Herald's story on the incident made national news.

The no-hat rule is meant to ensure respect for court proceedings and the judge. In the aftermath, Hollenbeck said he made no excuses for his behavior and decided that the rule no longer would apply in his courtroom.

Once he wraps up his career, Hollenbeck plans to spend more time with his wife, travel, fish and play golf.

"His retirement will conclude over 45 years of public service in one form or another," according to a letter on Hollenbeck from Benton County District Court. "His services have ranged from serving in

combat in the U.S. Army, teaching school from elementary to college, coaching everything from Little League to high school baseball, football, soccer, basketball and track."

Hollenbeck has been a member and president of the Kennewick School Board, overseeing the construction of Southridge High School, Lampson Stadium and several elementary schools.

He also is co-founder of Focus, a Kennewick community task force to fight alcohol, drugs and violence in the schools, and fostered placement of law enforcement's school resource officers in middle and high schools, the letter said.

Hollenbeck has served on the board of governors for the state's District and Municipal Court Judges' Association for three years. He also instituted an on-call system that gives law enforcement and attorneys access to judges 24 hours, seven days a week.

Hollenbeck previously worked as a prosecutor and a public defender and operated an extensive private practice. He and now-retired court Commissioner Bill Platts started a program that strongly encouraged young lawbreakers to get their high school diplomas or GEDs instead of going to jail.

-- Kristin M. Kraemer: 582-1531; kkraemer@tricityherald.com